

Fear, Freedom, and Forgiveness;
A Goal Toward
Wholeness and Healing for Single-Parents with Custody

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of the Requirement for the Degree
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By
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ABSTRACT

Single-parents with custody of their children are often afraid of dealing with their ex-spouses. This is particularly true when single-parents feel that having custody of their children helps them retain a relationship which gives them a measure of self-worth that is lost during the divorce.

Single-parents with this sense of fear may also feel that if their children have a relationship with estranged-parents, they may lose their children's love and that sense of self-worth which comes by receiving custody. This crises of single-parents with custody makes forgiveness of estranged-parents extremely difficult.

I am a single-parent with custody who knows the fear of losing a child's love to an ex-spouse. I bring together theology and psychology and use that experience to discover what must happen between people before reconciliation and renewal in the form of forgiveness can be authentically achieved.

Through this study, I have discovered that I could not really come to forgiveness until I had freed myself from the old destructive relationship I had with my ex-spouse, and established a new helpful relationship. This new relationship is related to Game-Free intimacy, a term derived from Eric Berne's form of therapy, Transactional Analysis,

and is analogous to the relationship of Grace and love which God has established with human beings through Jesus Christ.

My conclusion of the study is that if ministers want single-parents to forgive their ex-spouses, they must first concentrate on helping single-parents overcome the fear of losing their children to those ex-spouses. This overcoming comes about by having single-parents concentrate on a new Game-Free relationship with their ex-spouses and their children, rather than having them re-establish an old relationship with its pitfalls and memories of pain.

INTRODUCTION

Problem Addressed

Single-Parents with custody are often afraid of losing their child's (children's) love to parents not having custody. This makes the forgiveness of the estranged spouse particularly difficult. This project deals with the dynamics involved and the importance of forgiveness to the healing process for single-parents.

Importance of the Problem

I am a single-parent with custody. I have experienced the trauma of divorce and a custody trial and know how important children are to parents receiving custody. When it comes to custody, children are much more than offspring. Children help give single-parents an identity. They mold us, make us, and assist us in a renewed sense of self-worth. The danger is that single-parents may ground too much of their identity in children, and may grow fearful when an ex-spouse demands an identity from the same source. To have an identity shaken by a broken relationship is bad enough; to further have that role destroyed by losing the child's love to one who lost, or gave up, custody in court is worse.

Christian love and forgiveness are at the forefront of the Church as a healing community. Unfortunately, when

these come into contact with single-parents who have a lot of fear, they are swept away in the anxious and emotional battles over children's affections. In these instances, the call for love and forgiveness may come across as a moralistic club or seem an impossible expectation of Christian living.

The rationale for the project, exploring the role of forgiveness in the healing process of overcoming fear, can best be explained as resolving the conflict in my own experience. Forgiveness, as a healing process, has worked for me, but in order for it to become effective it took time, struggle, and the letting go of false hopes. I want to explore forgiveness, to understand it, to discover why it worked, and to pass on what I have learned. I hope this exploration can be used by ministers and lay people in helping others come to a sense of wholeness and renewal of spirit within the Christian tradition.

Thesis

This project undertakes to show that forgiveness is a personal channel of grace in overcoming the fear single-parents have of losing their children's love to parents not having custody.

Description of Terms

Single-parents: For clarity's sake, I want to restrict this term to parents having sole custody of their children. I realize that parents not having custody are

also single-parents, but I will use a different term for them.

Ex-spouse or estranged-parents: These terms will be restricted to those parents not having the primary custody of children of divorce. More precisely, "ex-spouse" will describe the relationship between the divorced couple, while "estranged-parent" will describe the relationship with the child.

Custody: Custody is a legal term describing the relationship the courts have placed on parents having primary responsibility for the care, nurture, and welfare of children of divorced parents.

Grace: Grace is a theological term describing God's relationship to us as love amidst freedom. It also denotes the love that human beings receive from each other in bringing about Game-Free intimacy. I will distinguish between these two understandings in the body of the paper.

Freedom: When I use the word "freedom," I will be referring to a measure of how we function freely within the context of our environment. I realize that no person is truly and honestly autonomous. We are all connected in a sense, and can never be isolated, autonomous, individuals who are unaffected by each other's existence; however, in this paper I am going to restrict freedom to two closely related meanings.

The first and major use of the term, will denote behavior between people which is both honest and open. This meaning is best brought out in the term "Game-Free intimacy." This meaning gives authenticity to feelings and actions in relationships. More precisely, it will describe an unstifling relationship between people in which they can know each other through honest, authentic, interactions.

The other meaning of the term will be used in the sense of an unselfish free act in which no payment is demanded by the giver. This will also be called "love amidst freedom" or "Grace."

Transcendence towards responsibility: This term will be used to signify single-parents seeing their predicament from a more objective viewpoint. Transcendence leads to a larger view of reality enabling single-parents to see themselves connected to other lives as well as to the lives of their ex-spouses and children.

This transcendent view of reality should lead to a responsive attitude, keeping single-parents open and aware of their connectedness to other human-beings. If this responsibility is taken seriously, it should also encourage single-parents to allow their children to have an honest, open, relationship with estranged-parents.

Work Done in the Field

Daniel Day Williams compares the Christian experience of forgiveness with the psychological account of acceptance.

According to Williams, forgiveness is Grace in the midst of sin. Sin can be experienced as the usurping of God's place by an elevation of humans, a glorification of self over and above the influence of a higher power, or, sin can be understood as a rejection of self--an inner division in which the self feeds upon its own gratification--a defiance of life experienced as abuse and desecration.¹ The power of forgiveness is in the atonement, a power given to us in a new relationship to God experienced in acts of love and described in the doctrine of Grace. It frees us from the bondage of sin.

Williams then gives a psychological account of acceptance in the midst of mental illness. Mental illness is "self's inner conflict;" a blocking of natural growth disrupting the self's power "to maintain a basic integrity of thought and feeling."² Acceptance is an opening up of the self to the world outside and admitting that a state of disruption exists. It is personal release and freedom from the bondage of inner conflict.

Both forgiveness and acceptance are channels to health and wholeness. Each word denotes the route to wholeness as the release from a bondage in self. This discussion by Williams leads him to discover that the Christian experience of forgiveness is analogous to the psychological account of

¹Daniel Day Williams, The Minister and The Care of Souls (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 72.

²Ibid., p. 75.

acceptance. The two descriptions remain two, but they interact, intertwine, and involve each other as the self is transformed in release from sin, inner conflicts, and personal fears.

The problem now is how can the minister as counselor use psychology's understanding of acceptance to help single-parents overcome barriers keeping them from forgiving their ex-spouses.

Scope and Limits

More precisely, this project will show how important forgiveness is to single-parents by discussing what must happen between single-parents, ex-spouses, and children before forgiveness can be achieved. As will be discussed in the paper, there is a connection between single-parents' identity and the custodial relationship with children of divorce. For forgiveness to be achieved between single-parents and ex-spouses, there must be a transformation of the old relationship--including a transformation of single-parents' identity based solely upon the custodial relationship with their children. The new-type relationship called for is "Game-Free intimacy," a term taken from Eric Berne's method of therapy called Transactional Analysis. It is through this Game-Free relationship that I develop the paper, and introduce a new relationship from which forgiveness can come.

Procedure for Integration

The method for the project will consist of research

in theology, pastoral care, and psychology combined with my own experience of being a single-parent with custody who knows the fear of losing a child's love. A key in this experience is a discovery of my own sense of freedom in my relationship to God, and in my personal relationships to others.

I will be integrating theology and Game-Free intimacy through an acknowledgment of God's love as Grace, and through the freedom of human beings to partake and receive that love. My deduction from this understanding of God's love as Grace will lead the discussion to acknowledge that as God shows God's love and concern toward human beings through Grace and forgiveness, our own responsibility toward other human beings should show the same love and concern. As we have a new relationship with God through Grace and forgiveness, so also must single-parents have a new Game-Free relationship with their ex-spouses.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter one: This chapter discusses and clarifies the problem in using forgiveness as a theological goal. It describes the parent-child relationship and how the parent derives an identity from the custody situation. It discusses Christian love in forgiveness and the problem of self-worth in trying to attain forgiveness.

Chapter two: This chapter centers around the psychological dimensions of forgiveness. It attempts to describe

the psychological dynamics of forgiveness and show how those dynamics can help build the self-worth of individuals.

Chapter three: This chapter draws upon chapter two and discusses the interactions of single-parents in their relationships with ex-spouses and children which lead to forgiveness.

Chapter four: This chapter shows how the insights expressed above can be used to counsel single-parents who have fear of losing their children's love to estranged-parents. It discusses the role of the minister, and gives suggestions in building trust and articulating Game-Free intimacy.

Appendix: Here I will present a fictional story showing how Game-Free intimacy can be combined with a Christian understanding of love and Grace.

Chapter 1

FORGIVENESS AND SINGLE-PARENT IDENTITY

A couple meet, they fall in love, they marry, a child is born through that love. Time passes, the relationship grows stale, love ends, hope gives way to bitterness, and divorce ends the marriage.

The above pattern is all too familiar. In reality, though, divorce is not the end of the relationship between the man and the woman. Divorce is the beginning of a new relationship, with two people bound together by the presence of a child who connects the couple in that they must each deal with visitation, child-support payments, and custody rights. In this chapter, I want to look at the world of single parents, particularly the world of single-parents with custody who are afraid of losing their children's love to parents not having custody.

Parent-Child Relations and Fear

In his book, When Parents Divorce, Bernard Steinzor entitles a chapter, 'The Contract for Humans.' In this chapter, he explains that custody is much more than responsibility for the child. It is also a reflection on the

integrity of the parents.¹ Children are much more than offspring, when it comes to custody. They represent the responsibility parents have received as supposedly determined by the courts. That responsibility influences the self-worth of parents.

Life is not an easy affair. It consists of endless possibilities of hurt, heartache, joy, hope, and more. As Norman Pittenger says, "love hurts."² To be in the midst of life involves this possibility of hurt. From my own experience of being a single-parent, I know that I assume an identity in the loving relationship with my son. I know that because I received custody, I got a boost from the courts in developing a sense of self-worth in spite of my divorce. I have discovered that as time passes, the identity I have with him changes. I am still his father, but the parent-baby relationship I had earlier has given way to another relationship, a relationship of a parent to a five-year-old. Development and growth never cease as long as we are alive and interacting with each other. This development and growth are something that the courts cannot place restrictions on. My own development and growth with my son are constantly in flux. If I do not learn to love and grow with him, I could lose the intimate relationship we now have. I cannot depend upon the courts to give me a sense of self-worth. That sense of self-

¹Bernard Steinzor, When Parents Divorce (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), pp. 69-71.

²William Norman Pittenger, The Meaning of Being Human (New York: Pilgrim Press), p. 19.

worth can only come about if the fear of losing his love and affection to my ex-spouse (the one who lost custody in court) is overcome.

In dealing with fear, it must be realized that fear is a vital part of reality. It is reasonable to fear things which exist in this world. It is reasonable to fear certain realities in relationships. It is reasonable to fear the things which hurt and hold us in their power. Most, if not all of us, have a fear of death. Death is a concrete and specific reality. Most, if not all of us, have a fear of risk. Risk is also a concrete and specific reality. We live with both death and risk. Those who have conquered these two fears have replaced them with something more like fascination. People become fascinated. People become fascinated by death, and fascinated by risk. In fact, simply to be a living, breathing, human being is loaded with risk. Norman Pittenger writes about risk-taking, love and human existence:

My life is always at risk. This is not a very comforting thought but it happens to correspond with reality and we had better accept the fact--if we do not, we are looking for trouble, for disappointment, for disillusion, and ultimately for sheer despair. Most of us, however, see the point. We may not talk about it nor put it into so many words, yet we are prepared to take risk because we feel that there is no other way toward the goal that we want to reach.³

No fear is simply unreasonable. In the general sense of the word, all fear is reasonable. The question is not whether we have fear, but how we function in spite of it.

³Ibid., pp. 22-23.

Over time, our fears can become accepted as a part of reality, a part of life. New meaning replaces the old, and people function in spite of fear. The fear single-parents have of losing their child's love is real enough. The way single-parents live with that fear is what makes, or breaks, the relationship with their children. Christianity has a lot to say about the way we function in spite of the harsh realities of life. It is much more than a grin-and-bear-it attitude. It is a transformation of the way we look at reality and function within it. For single-parents, the first step in functioning, in spite of this fear, is recognizing its reality.

Living in the midst of certain fears involves a degree of self-worth. It takes a sense of self-worth and security to function in life without denying the interaction with other selves which helps form and mold us. One of the great blocks to the self-worth and security of single-parents is the loss of someone, or something, in their lives which helped give reference to who they were as husband, wife, lover, father, mother, etc. The role they once had is gone. A new role is in the making. The approach used in most counseling workshops on divorce and single-parenthood centers on self-worth and a heightening of self-esteem.⁴ To be

⁴Peter Barnett, Parenting Children of Divorce (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1980) is one of them. A fairly complete annotated bibliography on the One-Parent Family is available through the University of Toronto Press. See Benjamin Schlesinger, One-Parent Family (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

shaken out of a role which gives parents a part of their identity is hard enough. To further have that role destroyed by the removal of a child's love is even more frightening. It takes time to be secure in a new identity. It takes an understanding of life as a continuing process with changing roles and new identities. For those who profess Christianity, and take that religious identity seriously, it means accepting changing roles and new relationships--always under the constant scrutiny of love.

Love as Forgiveness

Christian love is a large and loose term. Much has been written on it. The subject of love has been explored, dissected, operated on, and sucked dry of much meaningful content. To understand and know the meaning of love is a kind of mystical experience. It is an old idea to say that love is at the heart of Christianity. Such authors go beyond saying that love is at the heart of Christianity and write of love being the center and meaning of human existence: an all-inclusive reality which cuts through religion and culture. Norman Pittenger writes this of love and human existence:

When lovers tell the beloved, "I love you," they are really saying that deep inside they are aware that the love wherewith they love is greater than themselves; it is the way things go--and it is the path to genuine fulfillment of human potentiality. For them we are doing more than breathing (important as that is if life is to go on), we are living. . .For us human it is love that makes the world go round. . .Anybody who has come to

love another, anyone who has been ready to receive love from another, will know whereof I speak here.⁵

Henry Nelson Wieman uses the expression, "the order of love," as a description of God. He writes in his book, The Issues of Life:

Can we state in very simple language what we believe is the nature of this order which is God? Yes, we can describe it in very ancient and very simple language. It is the order of love.⁶

Also from the same source:

God is that order of love which includes possibilities, which includes and mediates the greatest value that is to be achieved. . . Human thinking and human effort are ingredients in the order of God, and help to make it.⁷

Daniel Day Williams sees love as spirit and distinguishes it from form:

So far then we have the basis of all care of souls. It is an action in love which makes concrete the spirit of the ministry we know in Christ. But there is a strangeness about such love. It is spirit, never mere form. To love means to conform our action to the concrete needs of the neighbor. . . Love becomes incarnate in the acts of persons who seek one another in a spirit which opens the way to a deeper relationship. Adoration, forgiveness, sacrifice, mutuality, are all themes of love, but none of these allows arbitrary boundaries to its creative power.⁸

Love can never be contained by a single act or form, although the act or form can contain the spirit of love. Love is what we as Christians should strive for, and should hope for in our relationships. It is what gives meaning to

⁵Pittenger, pp. 16-17.

⁶Henry Nelson Wieman, The Issues of Life (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930), p. 176.

⁷Ibid., pp. 163-64.

⁸Daniel Day Williams, The Minister and the Care of Souls (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 17-18.

human existence and is the binding force around which we receive an understanding of God's relationship to us.

As Christian ministers and pastors, we are driven by an ultimate commitment beyond ourselves. Most human beings are so driven, even if they are not aware of it. Wieman discusses that which truly is the possible good to be sought in all of life. To put it simply, he speaks of serving God, the order of love, in such a way "that the greatest possible value will be realized." This definition always places human beings in a position where growth does not end in short-lived goals, but always looks on to the future--always reaching, always striving, always serving something beyond that which we have achieved, or will achieve.

By applying that concept to the growth achieved by single-parents in dealing with their fear, no single form of love can be seen as an ultimate goal. It is this constant maximum living of human potential in serving an order of love which keeps us from idoltry. Love is the goal of the minister as counselor in helping single-parents cope with their fear and in security. Yet, if single-parents are to open up to love in the personal renewal of spirit, they must partake of risk in the authentic experience of forgiveness.

For single-parents who have not dealt with their fear, forgiveness is not an easy matter. It can only be attained in time. To expect divorcees to forgive those who have hurt them, without time to attain some sense of security in their role as single-parents is presumptuous. In fact, it is more

than presumptuous. Such an expectation needs to be flushed out completely if forgiveness is to be attained.

Psychologically, the ability to forgive can be seen as a measure of self-worth people have in their identity as single-parents. Without this security, the word and idea of forgiveness may mean nothing to single-parents but lip-service to the seemingly impossible expectation of the Christian, or it may feed a sense of low self-worth in a grin-and-bear-it attitude. Once forgiveness can openly and honestly be spoken about and affirmed, without being a threat, the journey to Christian wholeness and health is truly under way. To attain the honest experience of forgiveness, without using it as a moralistic club, is a step in helping single-parents with custody live with fear of the children's love for other parents. What must happen to attain that step to forgiveness is the question now to be discussed.

Chapter 2

THE FUNCTION OF FORGIVENESS AND THE SELF

Human beings are thinking, feeling, free creatures. As we function in society, there are psychological needs to be fulfilled if we are to advance in growth and wisdom. Using forgiveness as a goal in helping people grow involves certain Christian beliefs and traditions. The theme I want to draw attention to in this chapter is freedom and Grace. To try to forgive, without a sense of freedom and Grace, is a hindrance to creativity and growth. In this chapter I hope to show that forgiveness cannot be achieved apart from this sense of freedom and Grace.

Forgiveness and Freedom

I understand freedom working in two forms: the inner freedom of the self, and the freedom of interaction with others. In interaction with others, freedom brings about the security to be onself in the midst of society. It is created out of want, and is nurtured by love in self-actualization. This sense of freedom allows one to take in the experience of another, to hold onto that experience, to make it a part of the self, and to let go of those elements keeping the self from further growth.

In our relationship to other human beings, we do not stand with unrestricted freedom. We stand with personal responsibility amidst freedom. Research in sociology has shown the importance of society in shaping the roles of individuals.¹ Speaking of freedom amidst the social and cultural taboos of human beings may seem fruitless. However, people are not passive objects to be fashioned by others.

Zick Rubin reports:

These studies might lead one to the conclusion that people are essentially passive objects, molded like clay into various shapes and forms by their fellows and their societies. But such an analysis would be incomplete. We must recognize that we are not only the molded ones but the molders. The expectations, roles, and institutions that pattern people's behavior and attitudes are themselves created by people.²

This meeting and interaction of people with other people gives identity to the self. Norman Pittenger advocates this idea of relationship from a theologian's perspective:

Relationship with another is indeed "what matters most of all in life." . . . To be able to grasp this (even if we cannot put it into words) and to fill ourselves somehow enabled to act on this basis, is the condition for our true becoming, our realization of potentialities latent in us, our coming to wholeness of life. For all this is possible only with others with whom we are "able to make contact." To take "that first step" is to open the door to continuing enrichment of life both for ourselves and for the human community.³

¹An excellent book on such research is Zick Rubin (ed.) Doing Unto Others (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974), a collection of papers on social behavior, chosen for their readability.

²Zick Rubin, "Molding," in his Doing Unto Others, p.39.

³William Norman Pittenger, The Meaning of Being Human (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982), pp. 90-91.

Henry Nelson Wieman writes about the personal interaction between people being more than the simple exchange of ideas. This interaction is the beginning of new possibilities and the stimulus for human potential. He writes:

But whether it be in marriage or elsewhere, this kind of friendship is needed if the highest and best possibilities of which an individual is capable are ever to be elicited and developed. If he does not find such friendship, and so misses this mutual self-expression and appreciation, much that he might have been will remain stunted, starved, and maimed. He who has not one with whom he can communicate otherwise inarticulate and undeveloped meanings falls just so far short of being the personality he might have been, and has missed just that much of the possible richness of life.⁴

Neither does this shaping of the self escape the influence of the past according to John B. Cobb, Jr.:

The psyche or soul is nothing but a succession of experiences. Each of these experiences takes account of all sorts of things and events. The past experiences in a person's life are only one portion of this total world. Similarly, the momentary experience does not contribute only to those future events which will constitute that person's life. It contributes to the experiences of others as well.⁵

Thus, not only is the self shaped by past and present interactions with others, but the future is open wide before us with endless possibilities and new experiences.

Psychologically, I define forgiveness as an exercising of love in freedom, interacting with other human beings, helping to shape the personality of self. In renewing the language of forgiveness for single-parents, freedom must be

⁴Wieman, The Issues of Life (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930), p. 48.

⁵John B. Cobb, Jr., Theology and Pastoral Care (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 36f.

understood or forgiveness will be conceived as law instead of Grace and renewal.

The word Grace is derived from the Greek word "xapis," and the Latin word "gratia." The meaning is brought out in the sense of "favor freely shown,"⁶ a concept related to the atonement in the New Testament, where it takes on greater meaning, being used in relation to God through Jesus Christ. To Paul, God's Grace is understood as the free gift of Christ given to human beings;⁷ however, the idea of grace as a free gift also includes the working of God's love through human beings.

Another form of freedom, closely related to the freedom of interaction with others, is the freedom of the self from inner anxiety. Inner freedom is a basic personality hunger. Anybody who knows the pain of being alone, being afraid, and floundering by a loss of meaning of life, knows what inner anxiety can do to stifle the creativity of human existence. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., writes.

With the existential therapists, the pastoral counselor should aim at helping persons to become more fully human, to release that creativity, awareness, and inner freedom which constitute the imago dei. To the degree that a man actualizes his essential being as a man, he finds his place in the universe and is able to transform existential anxiety into a life-enhancing force in his experience.

⁶P.S. Watson, "Grace," in Alan Richardson (ed.) A Dictionary of Christian Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 147.

⁷Most sources devote large sections on Grace as understood by Paul. His understanding prevails today as most later Christian writing seems to repeat Paul's idea of Jesus as God's Grace. (See Kummel, Bultmann, or any good commentary on New Testament Theology).

Fear of death loses its power to paralyze as one becomes more alive and authentic. The person who treats himself like a machine, who feels he has never lived, whose awareness, inner freedom, and creativity are trammled by neurosis, is most terrified by death. Conversely, the person who has learned to relate, to create, to be aware and inwardly free, and thus moves toward fulfilling his most human potentialities, is able to transform his feelings into a stimulus for living more fully. . . he participates in what Bugenthal calls the "celebration of beings."⁸

Anxiety and fear are closely related. "Fear" is used to describe a person's reaction to a specific threatening object. "Anxiety" is used to describe a vague worry or apprehension that has no specific cause. Beginning with Freud, psychology has described anxiety as due to "unconscious conflicts, and internal tugs-of-war" between biological and mental impulses against social norms. Recently the cause of inner anxiety as conflict has expanded to include forces within the mind in the form of dependency needs, versus independence from those needs.⁹ (As an example: feelings of anger being repressed out of a belief that anger is bad, or feelings of guilt being repressed out of a belief that guilt is bad.)

Anxiety as inner conflict can lead to many forms brought out in fears. Fears of dogs, of cats, of water, of closed places. In Christianity, the form of inner conflict spoken about in psychology, is understood as sin and alienation.

⁸Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 254.

⁹Markus K. Holland, Psychology, an Introduction to Human Behavior (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1978), p. 10.

It is the splitting off of humans from God. Internally, it is an inner conflict which inhibits growth and creativity manifested by guilt. Williams writes:

Sin is violation of our essential nature, therefore it always results in a state of inner dividedness. We are at war with ourselves as well as with God. Here is the theological understanding of why men turn to a deceitful self-glorification or to self-destruction. We defy God by asserting our power and goodness as absolute, or we try to flee from ourselves.¹⁰

The divided self also leads to the larger manifestation of sin in the connectedness and interaction of society. Again Williams writes:

The Christian description of this divided self has always used the image of the self's bondage, without losing sight of the truth that this bondage is guilt. We are responsible, yet we become helpless to extricate ourselves from the maelstrom of our distorted selfhood. Let us not accept this assertion of the reality of man's guilt as something obvious. There are great perplexities here. There is the history of each life as it is influenced by other lives, and the fact of our mutual involvement in destructive action.¹¹

We all share in society's injustice against others. Sin's burden is heavy, and Grace as forgiveness is its cure.

Human beings are essentially whole creatures. What pastoral counseling should strive for is wholeness of self in openness to freedom's interaction with others. If a person is secure enough to be open in forgiveness, a person is free enough from inner anxiety stifling openness and growth. Freedom in society and inner freedom of self meet and mesh in forgiveness. They intertwine and interact as

¹⁰Daniel Day Williams, The Minister and the Care of Souls (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 73.

¹¹Ibid., p. 73.

each element draws out and illuminates the other. Paul W.

Pruyser writes:

In the last analysis this means that the ego's zest and effective functioning are the yardstick of health and wholeness. When there is positive self-esteem without undue narcissism, and when the scope of the person's freedom has been enlarged through autonomous ego functioning, some gain has been made and some maturity has been reached.¹²

Thus freedom's functioning in forgiveness can not only be a theological release from inner anxiety, but psychologically, can be a type of ego-building exercise strengthening and restoring self-esteem.

Forgiveness and Restoration

It is insufficient to speak of the self's inner freedom as the only cure for the single-parent's fear of losing a child's love. People can be free from many things. People can reach out to others in freedom and forgiveness and still fail to have purpose or meaning in dealing with fears. Just as forgiveness can not be a mode of healing apart from freedom, freedom can not be a mode of healing apart from some type of stimulus for living. One difficulty in the traditional sense of forgiveness is that it always seems to give, it always sacrifices, it never receives, and never helps to bestow life in the forgiver, except by giving the relief that we have done what God has told us to do. Unfortunately, even the belief that we must forgive in spite of everything, does

¹²Paul W. Pruyser, A Dynamic Psychology of Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 328.

not replenish and renew the self. The idea of forgiveness, then, may add to the burden of Christian living as law, and may prevent honest dealings with feelings. If forgiveness is able to renew the self through freedom, it must help generate stimulus for living and work for a larger measure than its own end. Wieman writes:

But some sort of stimulus everyone must have if he is ever to reach the floodtide of life which his native construction, health, and environmental conditions make possible. A mere spurt of physiological effort due to threatening horns will serve to show what a stimulus can do, but we must have a stimulus which is more pervasive and continuous and hence will quicken all the powers throughout long stretches of living. If we do not find it, we shall never discover our powers and will never live to that abounding measure that we might.¹³

Forgiveness is openness to living, and freedom in partaking of possibilities for the future. Striving for forgiveness does not stifle or close people off to others. Psychologically, forgiveness opens people to other people, invoking feelings and thoughts, creating an energy all its own. Forgiveness generates love, hate, or indifference; basic psychological emotions which human beings share in, and use as stimulus for living.

Objects of love can provide stimulus for life as can objects of hate. Wieman describes this energy:

The energy of life is not like the stream which dashes against the rocks and foams against the banks, but, rather, like the great river which moves in peace and power to float the ships and turn the wheels. When the proper stimulus is found many impulses are quickened, but they are quickened harmoniously. Each propulsion sustains and promotes the other. Thus the powers of the

¹³Wieman, p. 75.

individual do not obstruct one another. Energy, instead of being consumed in friction, is fulfilled in rich experience and magnitude of accomplishment.¹⁴

This energy can express itself in love, or even in defiance of God in hate. Daniel Day Williams quotes one of John Barrymore's friends to show how the self can draw strength from abuse:

And to complete the dialectic, this very self may draw strength from a defiance of life and God. One of John Barrymore's friends, discussing the great actor's behavior in his last years, said,

And I wish to tell you now that my opinion of his character. . . is this: When he sneered at and abused himself beyond the tolerance of the crowd, it was not done through weakness but through strength, a defiance of God.¹⁵

Forgiveness is able to ignite stimulus for living.

We receive our energy in relationships and experiences with others. If people want to renew energy for the future, they need to practice openness and awareness in interactions with the stimuli around them. If new experiences are shut out, then there is death. If we keep open to the things about us, then there is restoration of spirit, and life.

In awareness, there comes a time when repose is called for. I describe it as a feeling of well-being amidst constant renewal. It takes place when people stand back, and catch a momentary glance of who they are and how they feel. Restoration of the human spirit comes about in the midst of transcending

¹⁴Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁵Williams, p. 73. Here the author is quoting from Gene Fowler's Good Night Sweet Prince.

one's desires.¹⁶ For some, seeing themselves from a transcendent perspective is frightening. Desires and needs are often unconscious until seen through a different perspective. Lifting oneself out of a life setting, with the help of counseling, or feedback from others, forces thinking through actions and needs. When people are able to lift themselves out of their desires, and face who and what they are--without threat to the self, then they are living fully for the moment, and are truly free.

Transcendence is a manner of keeping integrity in the midst of uncertainty; a form of exercising the self in restoring strength to the personality. Yet, transcendence is risky business. Real security and fullness of spirit are not easily attained, except through time and a constant exercising of the ego. Yet, there is security in feelings being stirred, and comfort in transcending the self.

Security in our humanness is a deep fulfillment bringing joy and peace. It is the good grounded in uncertainty, and in the authenticity of feelings through the self's honest functioning. I do not say that feelings and actions of hate, personal pain, and emotionally hazardous situations are the good brought out in forgiveness. I say that these dynamics are part of what it means to grow in wholeness and creativity toward the future. Even a crisis (an instance where there is a lot of pain) can be a turning point for growth.

¹⁶Cobb, p. 22.

Transcendence also requires courage. There is a deep comfort for me in seeing desires for what they really are. In Biblical language "discernment of the Spirit" is a very good term describing how comfort is reached through transcendence. Comfort is derived by knowing oneself apart from desires and needs. The constant struggle in measuring value systems against experience and growing spiritually with others intensifies as transcendence broadens perceptions. The result is a security of knowing what is, and what is not, good for growth of the self. It is a sense of integrity amidst constant renewal; the freedom of the self amidst constant growth.

Summary

Forgiveness is an exercise of love amidst freedom. Freedom works in two dynamics: the freedom of interaction with the stimuli around us and the freedom of the self from inner anxiety within us. Forgiveness as a mode of healing seeks to strengthen the self-esteem of single-parents by freeing the self from inner conflict, and having single-parents understand that they can be free in their interactions with others. More precisely, this freeing is accomplished through accepting interactions with others as a part of growth; generating stimuli for living; and transcending wants, desires, and needs in momentary instances of forgiveness's reflection. Once freedom reigns, or we believe we can be free and behave that way, fears become something tolerable. They can be seen as helping shape the self.

Chapter 3

THE FUNCTIONING OF FORGIVENESS AND SINGLE-PARENTS

Rather than continue describing forgiveness in terms of how it functions in general, I move now to how it affects single-parents. More precisely, I will now attempt to describe what it means for the single-parent to forgive. In specifying the subject of this chapter, I am going to limit the discussion to the relationship of single-parents with their ex-spouses and their children. This does not mean that the dynamics of forgiveness are limited to this triadic relationship, but for the sake of clarity, I am concentrating on those relationships to which single-parents' attention is most intensely directed.

Freedom in Relationships

According to my description of forgiveness in chapter two, forgiveness is an exercising of love in freedom. To forgive, with love, suggests a freedom in relationships. Eric Berne, a California psychiatrist, has developed a system for understanding and improving relationships among people. He calls it Transactional Analysis. The principles of T.A. become popular with the emergence of his books, Games People Play, and Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy. The goal of T.A. therapy is to bring about Game-Free intimacy through

"the ideal form of human living described as 'autonomy.'"¹

One book which uses T.A. principles is Games Divorced People Play. In this book, the goal of the fully functioning, independent person, is achieved through awareness of destructive games. Some games are not destructive. In fact, many games renew and create in people a zest for interaction. Once people are aware of games in their lives, autonomous behavior can be recognized by the ability to continue, or to break the game. In the book, Games Divorced People Play, this ability is called assertiveness:

Assertiveness is the ability to create and maintain the conditions you want. It is a process and not an end in itself. This kind of power permits choices without losing sight of others. A truly powerful person is personally secure and has the wherewithal to negotiate or leave a situation without feeling the need to press on regardless of the consequences to himself or others.²

To be free, people must be assertive. They must give up destructive games hindering growth and qualitative life without closing off feelings, needs, or personal integrity in a self-centered attitude:

As people involve themselves in a growth movement, at first, they often develop a "Screw you, it's your problem" attitude. This misinterpretation of the concept of individuality reflects a misunderstanding of power, aggression and assertiveness.

The "it's your problem" philosophy is an attacking, aggressive position which doesn't allow for real listening and sharing of wants, needs and thoughts. While

¹This type of therapy is recommended for ministers in Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966). It offers a greater degree of flexibility and its principles can be easily understood.

²Melvyn A. Berke & Joanne B. Grant, Games Divorced People Play (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 17.

assertiveness is also a non-passive position, it does permit listening and encourages understanding.³

Divorce games are usually marital games in disguise.⁴ They have the same dynamics and needs which cause the initial breakup of the marriage. In these divorce games, there is no freedom from old roles. The same struggles, the same dynamics, the same hurts and needs continue on--that is until one of the players realizes that she or he no longer has to put up with the established roles, that with the divorce comes the opportunity to break out of the role in honesty and integrity. Divorce, even with a child involved, should be with freedom. If not, forgiveness ends up being another game.

When I write about forgiveness as an exercising of love in freedom, the freedom implies Game-Free interactions with other human beings. Bernard Steinzor has an interesting perspective on divorce with freedom. He writes:

I don't think it is possible for a person to live in friendly divorce unless he is adept at hypocrisy and self-deception, or has left a marriage that has been a friendly, shallow one, short-lived in emotional investment if not in years. Many of us know divorced parents who claim that though they have been deeply embattled, they have learned to become friendly. However, I am either skeptical about their reports or consider such people as having an unusual set of values about friendliness and friendship. Much that passes for friendship in our culture is friendship without years or effort. It is the kind of friendship in which one party tells the other to go see a doctor when the friendship gets difficult, or becomes strained if called on for more than a pleasant, sociable evening. It is the kind of relationship that experts in human relations foster when they tell the public to disguise genuine feelings by speaking in language others presumably want to hear. Within this system, the good parent as well as the good therapist

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

should never be angry, and if by some slip of the imagination he becomes so, he should think before he speaks.⁵

The term, divorce with freedom, is a description of the relationship with a former spouse. It is not contrived, and it is not phony. In fact, it may be the first time the feelings each spouse has toward the other are openly and honestly expressed. It is the beginning of something fresh and new, a getaway to open-hearted passion for each parent to explore.

For those parents with custody, divorce with freedom can accomplish two major steps in dealing with ex-spouses. One, it can help parents with custody be authentic in the new relationship. Two, once authenticity is established, it may open the path of reconciliation and renewed commitment to the relationship.

The attitude single-parents with custody have toward their ex-spouses, will affect the relationship they have with their children. Thus a divorce involving a child introduces a third person into the new relationship. It creates a situation where freedom in the new relationship can be expressed through the child.

At this time it may be well to note some effects of divorce on children. The question is raised, "Is divorce bad for children, or is it better for children to be nurtured in a family of dissension rather than have that family break up?" Of course, the argument goes, this depends upon the

⁵Bernard Steinzor, When Parents Divorce (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), p. 27.

family life at home. It could be that less damage will be done in staying together than would be done by getting a divorce. In this sense, it is better to stay together for the sake of the children. But in reality, is it always better? Freedom in relationships calls for authentic feelings being shared. This is very difficult when people have centered their lives around superficial loving. Usually, parents feel the family should stay intact because of the emotional impact of divorce upon their children. In a review of this impact, Jetse Sprey describes and reports research findings on children of divorce. His research indicates that not all children are emotionally upset by a divorce in the family. In some cases children of divorce do better in school, and have "only a slightly higher risk of emotional disturbance than those from unbroken, unhappy homes."⁶ Here he reports:

Nye and Landis, in two independent surveys, compare children from homes broken by divorce with those living in intact, but unhappy, ones. Nye found children from broken homes to do better each time. They showed less psychosomatic illness, less delinquency, and better relationships with parents than children from intact unhappy households. Furthermore, the two groups did not differ significantly with regard to adjustment in school or church.

Landis provides similar findings. He concludes that while the two groups of children exhibit many personality similarities, those from the unhappy complete families made the worse showing.⁷

⁶Jetse Sprey, "Children in Divorce: an Overview," in Earl A. Grollman (ed.) Explaining Divorce to Children (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 53.

⁷Ivan F. Nye, "Child Adjustment in Broken and in Unhappy Unbroken Homes," Marriage and Family Living XIX (1957), 356-361; Judson T. Landis, "The Trauma of Children when Parents Divorce," Marriage and Family Living, XXII (1960), 7, cited by Sprey, pp. 54-55.

Bernard Steinzor is more concerned about damage to children who are in the midst of an unpleasant home life, than about children whose parents have decided they cannot get along and so divorce. Here he reports:

In the consulting rooms of experts on family relations, stories like this are unfolded every hour. The disturbed adult had a parent who obscured the character of the other. Whereas the loving couple respect the unique relationship of each one to their children, the fighting couple cannot help interfering in each other's behavior toward the child. If a parent does not interfere actively, he will express his hostility through a "the hell with them" attitude. By abandoning an active interest in his child, a parent pushes him into the arms of the partner. This often results in overt clinging to and covert fury against the parent who appears to have open arms. The rejecting parent will be overtly disliked by the child, but covertly yearned for. Only out of love and respect for his partner can a parent have his own loving involvement with his child. When active or passive anger marks the tie between his parents, the child cannot grow out of the ambivalence he feels in the family relationships. He cannot realistically assess another person so that he can fairly claim his share of the credit or responsibility for what happens. When one parent does not interfere in the child's relationship to the other, it is much easier for the child to become objective about him. Even the devil himself can be dealt with adequately, once he is revealed as the devil.⁸

These conclusions do not mean that children of divorce are better off than children of intact homes, but it does point out that some children handle divorce much better than others, and that for some families, staying together can do more damage to the children than getting a divorce. Being honest and open with children is best for all concerned. It certainly is better than being caught up in a power struggle over affections. Even this power struggle can revert to a series of games with children being either the

⁸Steinzor, p. 47.

manipulators, or the manipulated.⁹ It is another instance where freedom in the relationship is a preferable alternative in building a bond of love and trust.

Although the relationship of single-parents with their ex-spouses may be the issue in these instances of fear, there comes a time when it is realized that the fear experienced, is the fear of loss, not of gain. Single-parents need not take on the burden of keeping ex-spouses out of their lives. There is nothing they can do to stop an occasional meeting through the children; however, what they can do in helping dispel fear is to concentrate on the relationship with their children instead of the relationship with ex-spouses. It is much easier for people to deal with relationships where they can build a bond of love rather than interfere with somebody else's relationship in building that bond. Single-parents need to personalize the relationship with their children and not allow the ex-spouse, or anyone else, to determine the direction that the relationship will take. It takes personal responsibility to build love and trust. Nobody can take that responsibility away unless they actually eliminate the will of the parents or children.

Louise Bates Ames describes what it takes to build good relationships with children of divorce:

The contributors make it quite clear that in the long run it is not so much what parents say as what they are that counts, not so much what parents do at a given time

⁹See Berke and Grant.

as how they have related with their children that determines how well the reality will be accepted. The authors emphasize that parents should live with their children during the good times in such a way that if bad times come, the relationship will stand up under the strain: and they stress the fact that some children can and will accept a difficult family situation better than others.¹⁰

The message for single-parents is that the loving relationship of single-parents toward their children will do more to influence a close bond than will any rules or regulations concerning the children's relationship to the ex-spouse. In other words, let children have their relationships with the other parents, but have single-parents with fear concentrate on their own relationship with their children by interacting with their children. Building a bond by personally interacting with children will do more to dispel fear than worrying about stopping children's interactions with others.

Another harmful relationship between single-parents with custody and their children is excessive attachment. I have written about a relationship with freedom, and working with children in developing that perception of reality. Yet, concentration on children may be so intense that it does not allow for single-parents to be parents, or for children to be children. What happens is that each may use the other in filling the void of the lost parent in the marriage. Steinzor warns:

The very demand on the child to fill a void in the emotional life of an adult that only another adult can fill will cripple his power to accomplish what he can by stipulating his magical notion that he can be all

¹⁰ Louise Bates Ames, "Introduction," in Grollman, pp. xi-xii.

things to all people. When an adult despairs about being alone, we can be rather sure that he is yearning for something he never had as a child. The mother who turns her child into a substitute companion is transposing her longing onto her child and forming a partnership of the rejected.¹¹

When a parent forms an excessively intense attachment in the relationship because of fear of being alone, the child may pick up on feelings of self-doubt. This can be avoided if both parents have their roles clearly defined. No mother can replace a father, and no father can replace a mother. Each can only be what she or he is. Trying to be someone she or he is not, can only add to the confusion the child may be experiencing. The more confidence parents have about their role; the more secure children will be about their own identity.

Another aspect of an over intense relationship can produce a single-parent-and-child-against-the-world-attitude. This perspective has single-parents and children intrinsically bound to each other without allowing room for freedom, or for interaction with significant others in their lives--especially the ex-spouse. In fact, for single-parents dealing with fear of losing their children's love, this attitude probably prevails. From the single-parents perspective, it is a perfect way to get back at the ex-spouses through the children, and to protect themselves from the hurts of the world. With this attitude, both single-parents and children cling to each other out of the fear of being alone. Problems of guilt and betrayal arise if one (the single-parent or the child) seeks new intimate relationships apart from the other.

¹¹Steinzor, pp. 171-72.

Stimulus in Relationships

Boredom and stagnation in relationships usually come about because more energy is expended in a relationship than taken in. If it takes a lot of energy, time, and investment to love someone else, with nothing in return, this deficit can create listlessness in the relationship. What happens, is that the relationship may end in boredom. Anger, then, with its many manifestations can be used to vent that boredom and channel it into an excuse for divorce. As I have mentioned, stimulus comes with openness, interaction, and awareness in freedom with others. Forgiveness helps make it possible to come to grips with emotions and needs concerning those who are close to us.

The old saying goes, everybody needs somebody sometimes. This saying seems to have credibility as Doing Unto Others reports:

People join others in order to obtain important psychological resources--provisions that go far beyond material goods and services. Especially in the face of high geographical mobility and rapid social change.¹²

People join others today in meeting needs. The only problem in this drawing together is that at times, coming together is more harmful than helpful. In regard to the often quoted phrase, everybody needs somebody sometimes, I am inclined to add that nobody needs somebody who uses them, hurts them, and drains them dry for personal gratification, anytime. In fact, ex-spouses may do anything but give positive stimulus

¹²Zick Rubin (ed.) Doing Unto Others (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 6.

for single-parents. In marital breakups, everybody goes through some sort of unhooking process as is discussed in

Games Divorced People Play:

Hooked refers to holding onto an attachment despite the fact that in the now, the relationship no longer meets the emotional needs of either party. Refusal or inability to unhook is the brick and mortar from which most "After Divorce" games are conceived, nurtured and thrive. . . Marital attachment. . . gives rise to feelings of safety, comfort and at homeness when the other is present, or felt to be accessible. These feelings persist even when both parties view the marriage as over. . . You are unhooked when you can see, hear, or interact with your ex-spouse without feeling bad. You are unhooked when you can perceive your ex-spouse as different and distinct from you.¹³

More precisely, positive stimulus for living in interaction comes about when single-parents are able to deal with their ex-spouses and children in freedom, rather than in bondage. Until the unhooking process is understood and dealt with, dealing with the relationship while still playing games is a game in itself.

An even more important function of forgiveness is to make possible strength and security through honest and open dealings with others. This lure of honest, open dealings with others strengthens the self by encouraging assertive and autonomous behavior, the primary goal in Game-Free intimacy. Howard Clinebell Jr., reports on freedom's inner workings in stimulating a sense of wholeness for a woman undergoing therapy:

Effective psychotherapy enhances inner freedom. After extensive depth pastoral counseling a woman could report: "I feel something is complete. For the first

¹³ Berke and Grant, pp. 18-19.

time in my life, I have access, to the full range of my feelings. Having access, it is up to me what I do with them. Before, I had no choice." The stranglehold of past relationships on her present life had been broken. Genuine alternatives had been opened in her inner world. Spontaneity had become a prominent characteristic of her feelings and relationships.¹⁴

This woman is now alive, stimulated to living by an inner freedom of the self.

To add to the above description, stimulus is also related to consciousness of the self a quality of strong self-esteem. Paul W. Pruyser, writing on the psychology of religion reports:

The self is a source of energy, a wellspring of action. The self is an actor, not merely a cog in a machine. In some people, however, this aspect of consciousness is diminished--they feel just like a cog in a machine that moves without initiative. To be active means to have a certain degree of autonomy and an area to be active in, perhaps a certain measure of freedom.¹⁵

The stimulus single-parents receive in the relationship with children should be of the same dynamics as the relationship with their ex-spouses, however, because children are in such close proximity to single-parents with custody, there is always the danger that single-parents may not give their children freedom to interact with others. Receiving stimulus from children is not difficult. The difficulty is in keeping a close loving relationship with children while leaving room, in openness, for significant others to enter into their lives. When single-parents ground a lot of who

¹⁴Clinebell, p. 270.

¹⁵Paul W. Pruyser, A Dynamic Psychology of Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 289.

they are into their children they are not free to interact with others. The danger is in shutting out other relationships. Instead of being open, they can become closed. Instead of interacting with others, they only interact with their children. When forgiveness functions with freedom, it can keep single-parents from, or should at least make them aware of, grounding too much of their identity in a person, or in other instances, a thing.

Responsibility in Relationships

Up until now I have been discussing rules and procedures helping single-parents grow in the relationship with their children and ex-spouses. These procedures are discussed in most secular references on counseling and therapy; however, because I think forgiveness offers a theological understanding of how human beings can function with each other in integrity and freedom, I want to offer the idea of transcendence toward responsibility as a functioning of forgiveness. Perhaps seeing life from a transcendent setting helps us all to be aware of the whole of human kind and to develop a sense of identity by affirming a place in the cosmos. Willard Gayland describes the feeling and awe of moving into an existence beyond ourselves. A description which places people at a point from which they can explore the mystery of eternity:

The transcendental experience is that sense of feeling lifted out of oneself. In the same way that immersion in an activity of fusion with a group allows us to expand the limits of self by including the activity of others in our sense of self, the transcendent feeling allows for an even larger attachment beyond groups,

things, people, world. When we are moved by some transcendental experience, we are reminded that we are a part of something even larger than the course and activities of our life. It is our sense of continuity beyond existence. To be a part of the cosmos, to affirm our place in the larger order of things excites us.¹⁶

The full implication of transcendence is much too large a subject to discuss in this paper; however, I think this sense of transcendence can help counselors and single-parents understand forgiveness as interaction with people, and, discover meaning in responsive actions toward others, moving them toward their own potential in healing and growth.

There is a sense of aloneness in being a single-parent; particularly when you are in a society where the normal family pattern is a two-parent family. The sense of transcendence can do much to lift that feeling of aloneness; however, once single-parents see themselves as a part of the whole of humankind, they may respond with a self-satisfied feeling that they are not alone and may be unresponsive in taking any action to relieve the strained relationship they have with their ex-spouses. Transcendence (seeing ourselves as part of the human race) without some sense of responsibility toward others can lead to laxity in responsive behavior toward others.

I have discussed how coming to forgiveness suggests a freedom in relationships. One means to this freedom is transcending the wants and desires of the moment by looking at them rather than away from them. Game-Free intimacy and divorce with freedom keeps people from falling back into

¹⁶Willard Gayland, Feelings (New York: Ballantine Books, 1979), p. 208.

inauthentic relationships resulting in superficial and irresponsible living by objectifying their behavior. Yet, an objective viewpoint of behavior in relationships derived from this sense of transcendence will do little good if there is an unwillingness to take some responsive action in bettering the relationship.

In my own struggle with seeing myself connected to my ex-spouse through our son, I experienced relief in knowing I was connected to others as well as to her. Once I saw myself also connected to others, I was able to pull myself out of a self-centered attitude and began expanding my perspective to include her feelings from a more objective viewpoint. Transcendence, then, became for me a momentary dis-identification from my own destructive behavior in our relationship by objectifying that behavior. It also helped me to see that I really had nothing to fear from her in regard to our son. In the larger scheme of things Jason would, and needed to, see his mother. I then began to take some responsibility by being sensitive toward her feelings in regard to her needing his love just as I do. I was overcoming my fear.

Single-parents coming in to the minister for counseling are looking for an objective viewpoint on their problem. The minister can give that insight, but action needs to be taken by single-parents in changing their own lives. The minister can help in this area by urging single-parents to take some responsible action in the light of seeing their fear from a transcendent perspective and in being open toward those they

are most intensely connected with. Howard Clinebell Jr., gives high priority to responsibility as he describes it as an essential ingredient of mature love:

Man also needs to live responsibly--i.e., in ways that do not diminish the personhood of others or block the fulfillment of their needs. Responsibility, structure, limits--these are integral to a genuinely loving relationship. Something essential is missing from a parent's love for a child if he cannot set limits or discipline the child. Mature love always involves the dimension of responsibility and respect for the needs of others.¹⁷

Transcendence, then, is needed to generate awareness in people, stimulating them to greater wholeness and autonomy, leading them to responsive actions of awareness in Game-Free relationships.

In relationships with children responsibility suggests letting go of desires preventing them from having an open, free relationship with their other parents. Again, Bernard Steinzor, writing out of his experience as a psychotherapist, says:

The mother and father must consider that only when both of them permit their child to have a free relationship with the other will the child develop his personal opinion of his parents independent of their opinion of each other. When one parent does not want a divorce with freedom, the other may have a more difficult time with his child. If one parent continues to resent and envy the other, the child may never be able to have a free relationship with either of them. When the custodial parent interferes, the other may be stirred to do battle to protect his own relationship with the child and will likely entertain thoughts of a custody fight, whether he engages in one or not.¹⁸

¹⁷Clinebell, pp. 19.

¹⁸Steinzor, pp. 74-75.

Earl A. Grollman also warns about the results of interfering with ex-spouse-child relationships. Here he reports what can happen when irresponsible action takes the form of interference as one parent disparages the other in the presence of the child:

In the grip of their anger, divorced people may lose perspective as far as their offspring are concerned. They try to justify themselves by placing the entire blame on the other parent. By disparaging the other mate, they force on their children the painful experiences of having to take sides. The bitter contest between the parents may have a certain harsh logic for them. Divorce does bring feelings of guilt, indignation, and revenge. . . . There is an intolerable hurt when either parent says anything denigrating about the other. It only keeps alive the bitterness and misunderstanding which brings parents and children so much pain in divorce.¹⁹

This disparaging of each parent over the other can only lead to children discovering that the response to being hurt is anger and revenge. Not only does it place children in a position where they will have to side with one parent over the other (because of a need children have to please and be loved), but also because it transfers to children the self-doubt and feelings of bondage to the old relationship of hate and hurt. This action, in the end, can be destructive as children grow into adults and hold one parent or the other responsible for destroying a relationship they may have needed and sought after.

Another side of this problem of interfering with ex-spouse-child-relations is that children may pick up on the lies and deceptions, and believe the same way toward their

¹⁹Grollman, pp. 24-25.

own children. Limits, then, are not set by the parents, responsibility is denied, and children may pass onto their own children, irresponsible behavior.

Summary

My description of forgiveness demands freedom in relationships. To be free means the freedom of interacting toward other human beings with authenticity. This freedom in relationships and Game-Free intimacy is especially demanded in divorce, a new type relationship.

Freedom in divorce means the freedom to interact, to be honest, to be authentic with the ex-spouse without falling back into the same pattern of living that caused the divorce. If the new relationship is not based on freedom, and forgiveness with reconciliation is demanded by the minister as counselor, that same demand will deny the expression of honest wants, feelings, and needs of those being counseled.

Freedom is also demanded in the relationship with children of divorce--though it takes on added depth because children are the ones single-parents deal with everyday. This dimension forces a more intense relationship with children. It also places single-parents in a position where they must deal with the relationship to their children on a personal basis. It is best to create a bond of love by interacting with the children, rather than by seeking to break up the relationship children may want, and have, with

the other parent. In building a bond of love and trust with children, being honest and open is better than playing games.

Single-parents are not only single-parents; they are adults living in a world of adults. The concentration of the relationship single-parents have with their children may cause problems if an over-intense attachment takes place. If so, the roles of single-parents, as mothers and fathers, may be confused, resulting in children and single-parents using each other in supplying wants and needs that only the other parent can give.

Forgiveness, an exercising of love amidst freedom, creates stimulus by allowing single-parents to deal with their feelings for the ex-spouse, and, in a theological sense, creates opportunities for greater growth and aspiration in shaping the self through experience. The sense of freedom with openness, hopefully, helps single-parents avoid closing themselves off from experiencing others and prevents them from grounding too much of their identity in their children.

I have included transcendence leading toward responsibility as a functioning of forgiveness to acknowledge our place as human beings connected with and behaving responsibly toward others. Forgiveness is more than acts of reconciliation. It is responsive actions to and for others through honesty, freedom, and love. For single-parents who have been hurt, behavior which is open and honest, will eventually lead to forgiveness which is open and honest. Hopefully,

single-parents and counselors taking the connectedness of human-kind seriously, will understand that freedom in relationships also means freedom for children of custody to interact with their estranged-parents.

If forgiveness is understood as an acknowledgment of transcendence toward responsibility, it will go far in healing the hurt and pain of divorce. It will not only open single-parents to other experiences, but will keep them open to new experiences of the future. A vital function if healing and wholeness is to continue.

Chapter 4

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

In this chapter I want to discuss the minister's role in the counseling process with single-parents who are dealing with fear, to offer two general suggestions in helping bring single-parents to the point of overcoming this fear by using forgiveness as a theological goal, and to discuss what it means to move beyond forgiveness of a particular person by moving into a larger view of reality which includes other human beings.

The Minister's Role

Ministers, in their own right, are theologians. At least that is a role society places on them. Every time ministers speak from the pulpit, they are considered to be expounding on the secrets of the Bible. Even in the counseling setting, ministers are considered more than just counselors; they are considered a special kind of people having vision and insight which others lack. Yet, ministers do not have to have formal theology to be theologians. In the everyday world of people in the parish, articulating formal doctrines of theology is not so much important as the insight and vision which theology reveals about reality. In this way, ministers can use their theology in practical,

appropriate, actions leading to a clearer awareness of this world and its complexities.

In this paper, I began with the assumption that love was the underlying factor which motivated ministers to believe what they believe and to do what they do. I also made the assumption that love was the center of Christianity, with forgiveness being a form of love that ministers can grasp and articulate to single-parents needing counseling. I like the idea that God is love and is involved in the counseling process. It reminds me that God is close whenever the feelings of love are expressed either in action or words. Love really is the way by which we fully participate in each other's world. Where there is any kind of hate and self-centeredness, love is continually calling people to overcome hate and self-centeredness. Where there is fear and distrust, love is continually calling people to overcome fear and distrust. To me, love's great victory is seen by its ability to bring harmony in all relationships. It is a kind of mystical, creative, transformation of the heart, and it does lead to forgiveness. In this sense, love is at the heart of all theologies of pastoral counseling.

To forgive another person with honesty and integrity means being free enough from the old relationship to not fall back into its destructive pattern. This is especially true with the relationship between divorced parents. It has been my experience that most single-parents (including myself) are fearful about ex-spouse and child relationships. With

the number of single-parents today, this fear will be the most common encountered by ministers counseling single-parents. I believe that forgiveness can function as the goal for ministers counseling single-parents who express this fear. At least forgiveness and reconciliation needs to be in the background of the counseling process as a measure of how far single-parents can come in overcoming their fear. In keeping this goal of forgiveness, ministers can lead single-parents to a renewed sense of self-worth and to actual forgiveness.

As the best route to forgiveness and wholeness, it would be wise if ministers, when dealing with single-parents, concentrate on freeing single-parents from their dependency on the past relationship with ex-spouses, and in turn, have them look to the future with emphasis on a new Game-Free relationship. By concentrating on overcoming their fear through Game-Free language, ministers can open single-parents to a different view of how they can function with their ex-spouses. This concentration will not only help single-parents develop a new sense of self-worth, but will hopefully lead them to allow their children to develop their own relationships with estranged-parents.

As ministers seek to help single-parents, they must remember that, theologically, they are also participants in the lives of those they counsel. By opening up, single-parents have already taken a step in dealing with their fear of losing their children's love. They have opened the door. It is up to ministers to participate with them and help them

into a new understanding of how to deal with that fear; however, when it comes to this fear, there is going to be a tension between trust and risk. Not all single-parents are going to want to enter into a Game-Free relationship with their ex-spouses. They are going to fear that kind of relationship, precisely because they have probably never experienced it with ex-spouses. Single-parents feel they have a lot to lose if they open themselves up to ex-spouses with a new type relationship. Game-Free intimacy implies that single-parents will have to have a relationship with ex-spouses. The minister needs to press that relationship, but also to explain that this relationship will be different than before and will only work if they are willing to take a chance and risk themselves in openness and authenticity. During this time of tension, single-parents need a lot of support and encouragement to take that step toward honest, open communication with ex-spouses.

In urging this step, ministers will have to determine for themselves whether single-parents have enough self-worth to take the risk in opening up to ex-spouses. If ministers determine that single-parents are not self-confident enough to take the step, the minister should tell single-parents that all behavior involves courage and risk and that some kind of action needs to be undertaken if they want to overcome their fear. The suggestions I will presently make, will help in building the self-confidence single-parents need to take that action.

Suggestions for Ministers

I want to make two general suggestions which ministers can use to help single-parents make the effort at Game-Free interactions with their ex-spouses. The first general suggestion deals with the task of building trust between ministers and single-parents. The second suggestion deals with ministers articulating to single-parents the idea of Game-Free relationships with ex-spouses and children.

In building trust between ministers and single-parents, ministers, as participants in single-parents' lives, should share some of their own feelings of risk and trust. They should share what they believe to be true about the world and reality--through their own experiences. This sharing includes what is believed true about God, about the human race, about participating in the human race. Whatever is said, whatever is done, whatever is articulated about relationships, responsibility, or fear, should be said in the sense of sharing. Sharing implies openness and honesty on the part of the minister. This is the best way to build trust, not only with single-parents, but with all people in counseling. Once trust is built, ministers will be able to be more assertive in their interactions with single-parents. Single-parents will also come to the point where they want more than sharing, they will want advice. Advice is appropriate, but should also be given with the sense of sharing. Giving advice is also an occasion for articulating the idea of Game-Free intimacy with ex-spouses and children.

In articulating Game-Free intimacy to single-parents, begin by concentrating on the relationship with children. This can help overcome the fear and apprehension they will have in dealing with ex-spouses through the children. Single-parents have already given too much time and effort in developing their fear, now is the time for development of trust with their children.

Have single-parents start by being honest with their children. For instance, if single-parents are apprehensive about their children being with estranged-parents, have them tell their children what behavior has caused them to feel the way they do. This not only forces single-parents to try to get to the root of their fear, but it also helps them articulate why they feel the way they do. If no specific behavior is forthcoming, perhaps single-parents can see that their fear is unfounded. Especially if they have to try to explain it in such a way as to make sense to children. Thus being honest with their children helps single-parents be honest with themselves.

In general, encourage single-parents to speak with their very young children by talking about feelings, and behavior. Do not separate the two aspects of human nature. Behavior is very important to children. Behavior is something they can grasp. Children explain feelings by their behavior. If anybody doubts what I say, just have them listen to children play. If one of them gets hurt, they always have a reason for the hurt and will probably not tell

you they are crying, or sad about something by articulating their feelings with words. If they are sad, they will cry rather than saying they are sad. It probably seems redundant for them to speak when something as obvious as crying is evident.

If single-parents' behavior in the past has been so destructive, children may not understand why there is a sudden change in behavior. Here single-parents will also have to be honest with their children by telling them that they want to be honest with their own feelings and that they do not like to be around the estranged parents. For instance: "Mommy and Daddy always end up fighting," or, "Mommy and Daddy cannot get along together. That is not to say you can not get along with your (other parent). I just want you to know that you have nothing to do with our fighting, but this is why we are apart, we are just tired of fighting and hurting each other and you. We both love you very much and just want this hurting to end."

After a Game-Free relationship with children has been established, then it is time for single-parents to deal with ex-spouses. This dealing must be done as soon as possible. Single-parents are going to participate with ex-spouses some-way, somehow. The way to forgiveness lies in this honest, open, relationship. Without Game-Free interaction between the two parents, the children may pick up on the false relationship that each has with the other. The healthy relationship can be initiated by plain, honest, open communication.

Ex-spouses will also have to learn how to trust again. The best way for that trust to begin is for single-parents to come out and say what they need to say to initiate that trust. For example, how would ex-spouses react if they heard this type of communication from single-parents: "I am still angry and hurt over what we went through and are still going through. I want you to know this because I have a lot of feelings I have to work through before I can learn to trust again. I want you to know that I have some anxiety about letting the children see you, but that is something I am working on, and I don't want to directly interfere with your relationship with them. My having custody will of course affect them, but I know they are your children also. We have hurt each other so much in the past and I want it to stop. I also want you to talk with me as honestly as you can and maybe together we can work something out so that the children can have an honest, open relationship with both of us. At least as honest and as open as possible under the circumstances."

Ex-spouses probably would not know how to react if they heard this communication coming from most single-parents. They may not believe it. Nonbelief would be a normal reaction when two parents have hurt each other in the past. Yet this communication is the beginning of something new. It is the beginning of a new, honest, authentic relationship as long as it is not used for the benefit of one parent getting "one up" on the other. Nevertheless, Game-Free interactions must come about if forgiveness is to be honest.

Continuing forgiveness

What happens when single-parents, ex-spouses, and children do attain this Game-Free relationship? What happens when the triadic relationship has come to a point where each is able to interact with the other without the old feelings once again raising up and overcoming the relationship? If ministers do not see a vision beyond Game-Free interactions between single-parents, ex-spouses, and children, Game-Free intimacy can itself become a form of game. What ministers also need to articulate to single-parents is a continuous, constant, striving toward a larger goal, always keeping them forgiving, trusting, and devoting themselves toward others' love.

Forgiveness, as a goal, provides stimulus for single-parents because it deals with an immediate problem for which they are seeking a solution. In this sense, the counseling process of pressing for Game-Free relationships is a stimulating factor and is a functioning of forgiveness. What must happen now, after Game-Free intimacy is initiated, is to expand the world of single-parents by pointing out that this same attitude needs to be extended to other aspects of life. In doing this, single-parents can move beyond their own problems and prepare themselves for future relationships.

Ministers can help single-parents move beyond their problems by helping them see themselves as participants in this world. This movement beyond Game-Free intimacy is, to me, the distinctive aspect of forgiveness. The functioning

of forgiveness as stimulus, Game-Free relationships, and transcendence towards responsibility moves beyond mere Game-Free intimacy to the attitude of being connected, not only to immediate relationships, but to future relationships.

In practice, ministers need to express to single-parents that forgiveness is only a beginning in openness toward future relationships. A new relationship has been established with an ex-spouse. It is not a re-establishment of the old relationship. Forgiveness opens up the future with a new attitude for new relationships. It is through this constant renewal of relationships that single-parents can move beyond forgiveness of ex-spouses and retain that attitude of forgiveness in other relationships as well.

Through my own experience, I discovered that the traditional language of forgiveness was interpreted by me as meaning that I must develop a loving attitude to my ex-spouse by renewing that past relationship. I was in bondage to the fear of being subjected to the same hurt over and over again. I only wish somebody had come up to me years ago and said, "I know you are hurting and confused at this time about your own identity, and I know your child helps you to retain an identity you want to cling to, but you still need to move on. Take this time to learn from what is happening to you. You do not have to cling to that old identity you once had through the past relationship. This is the beginning of something new. It is only through a different relationship that you will overcome your fear of

being hurt by your ex-spouse through your child. If you do not establish a new relationship with your ex-spouse, you will continue to live with your fear and never be free to be a person of the present; you will always be a person of the past and never experience the sweet sense of renewal."

For me, now, it is only through this fresh new relationship that I have come to reconciliation. If I had refused, I would still be in bondage to the old fear. I would still be trying to retain an old identity which has long past me by.

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APPENDIX

I want to present a fictional story showing how forgiveness can function in interacting, stimulating, and transcending wants, desires, and needs in instances of reflection. Mostly, it is a reflection of my own growth in learning to forgive and deal with my ex-spouse through our son, Jason. I introduce it to help readers understand the difficulty of achieving forgiveness without some sense of freedom and grace in relationships.

Donna and Karen

Karen Johnson asked if she could talk with her pastor that afternoon. She was fed up and angry. Karen had been separated from Dave for eight months now, but the separation did not seem to solve the problems which plagued their marriage. Now they were getting out of hand, especially with Billy, their seven year old son.

Billy seemed to resent Karen. Every time he came home from seeing Dave, his father, he was a "real terror." This behavior seemed strange to Karen because she allowed Billy to see his father whenever he wanted. It never seemed to be enough, though, and she was beginning to resent the whole situation. In fact, last week when Dave unexpectedly dropped by to see Billy, she blew up. He had never given her a life of her own, and now it seemed he was slowly and surely taking Billy from her. Even in divorce she could not

escape the problems which plagued the marriage. Billy was something special in her life she wanted to retain--and she was not going to let Dave get away with it. Even if she had to prevent Billy from seeing his father so much.

Karen's pastor was Donna Smith. Donna was also divorced. It was five years ago that she and Bill broke off their marriage of six years. Donna and Bill had two children, Joey, nine, and Cynthia, seven. As in most divorce settlements, the woman, Donna received custody of both children. Those first years of separation were hard on her. After getting settled in her new single-parent-life-style, Donna decided to go back to seminary where she could complete her degree program and return to ministry. It was not easy to go back to seminary with memories of the life she had had there with Bill. They were a pleasant couple back then, and nobody guessed that an incident like divorce would provide an opportunity to return with the children and make a life for herself in the ministry. After completing her degree program, she accepted the call, as pastor, to Karen's Church.

Being the new pastor of the Church had its difficulties, especially with the status of single-parenthood, but the members of the congregation accepted her. Her ability to overcome the status of the typical, helpless, single-parent was a strength the congregation admired in Donna. Karen knew that Donna, the new minister, was divorced and appeared to have the single-parent life well in hand. When she made the decision to speak with Donna, Karen thought a

woman minister, especially a divorced one, would understand her anger and possibly could make some suggestions on how to deal with the relationship between Dave, Billy, and herself.

When Donna discovered Karen wanted to talk, she was a bit concerned. Donna had read books and reference material on counseling from seminary, but the prospect of talking and actually giving advice to somebody aroused her anxiety. She knew about Karen's divorce and was no stranger to the problems of separation. She suspected Karen wanted to discuss these problems. She was not sure she could help, but she was willing to listen.

When Karen arrived at the Church, she was still seething over Dave's actions. "I'm sick of it, just sick of it," Karen said angrily. "It's a never-ending-battle between Dave and me over Billy. In fact, Billy is always comparing me to his dad. Billy comes home after a visit, and the first thing he does is tell me how wonderful Dave is. He says 'Daddy did this for me, Daddy did that for me, isn't Daddy wonderful.' I feel helpless, no matter what he says about Dave, I end up defending myself in front of Billy. Dave just seems to bring out a lot of anger in me. He knows it, and is using Billy to bring out a lot of things I want to forget. He is using Billy to continue the fights we had before the divorce."

As Karen went on, past feelings began to rise up in Donna about her own past situation. The hurt, the anger, the resentment from the time she and Bill were having their

problems. It was so hard for her to accept that she needed to be separated from him and to be alone with the children. Donna had asked herself why she wanted the divorce time after time. She could articulate some reasons: how Bill began to see her as the little woman, how, when she began to want a career after Cynthia was born he laughed at her. Even when she began to tell him of her unhappiness, he would look at her and say, "this is a phase you are going through, you will get over it." Nothing angered Donna more than his patronizing her. What Donna did not understand, was why the old feelings she thought she had worked through were once again welling up. She knew how much Joey and Cynthia meant to her. They not only kept her from being crushed altogether, but they kept her in an identity she was then unwilling to be released from. As Donna reflected further, she began to realize how, even now, she grounded a lot of her self-esteem in her receiving custody of the children. This was a mild shock to her. She always thought her strength lay in what she had accomplished, not in how she conceived herself in the relationship with the children. Donna was silent as Karen continued.

"I guess perhaps I'm just selfish. I know as Christians we are supposed to be loving, but to be truthful, I don't want to put on that front any more. I want a life apart from Dave and I want Billy with me. Is that wrong? Is it too much to ask for?"

Donna let out a sigh, "I don't know Karen, I really don't know."

Karen was startled. This was not the answer she wanted or expected from Donna. Usually Donna seemed so strong from the pulpit and at Church functions. For the first time, Karen noticed something wrong. Donna, the new minister, seemed unsure of herself. "Are you O.K.?" she asked.

"Well, yes. It's just that what you have been telling me has evoked a lot of feelings about my own divorce. I guess I don't mind telling you this, but I thought I got over a lot of my feelings of the past. Your situation reminds me so much of what I went through a few years ago that it has caught me by surprise. I don't know. It's not so much that it's right or wrong that you feel the way you do. I think it's O.K. that you want a life of your own. I remember I wanted a life of my own, but I feel uncomfortable about something; it's something I can't put my finger on. It's something in my situation of divorce that listening to you has brought out."

"I don't understand. You always seem to have everything so together. I bet you don't let your ex-husband treat you like Dave treats me. I bet you don't allow him to get to you through the children."

Donna was thinking again. She knew from her own experience that forgiveness was one of the keys that influenced the way she behaved towards Bill. It was hard though. She bent over backwards for him after the divorce. She even recalled how she resented having to treat him with kindness and sympathy. She was really angry, but she knew that anger was something childish and inappropriate for a Christian

that it would soon pass when she found herself. What troubled her most was the children. Oh how she resented it when they wanted to see their father. But Christian love demanded some sacrifices on her part. When Bill came around she was kind and cordial with him--not only for the sake of the children, but also for the sake of Christian love and forgiveness. Forgiveness, for Donna, had become a measure of how she behaved around Bill. It never occurred to her that what she felt about the relationship between Bill and the children, might also be a measure of her relationship with Bill. Yes, she could be civilized with him, but when it came to the children's interactions with their father, she was resentful. She finally answered Karen, "I always thought I didn't let him get to me, but what I feel now is not so much Bill getting to me through the children, but how I allow myself to be affected by him through the children."

"But that seems so detached from life. How can you not allow him to affect you through the children? How can you close your eyes to what he can do to you through Joey and Cynthia?"

Donna was really thinking now. Karen was right. The children were so much a part of her that what they thought really did matter. She could not be so cold as to close her eyes to Bill's relationship with the children. It would be closing her eyes to a very important aspect of her existence. She recalled back in seminary the difficulty she had with Second Corinthians, chapter two, verse five in the

case of a person who had been punished by the majority of the early Christian community. Tradition held it was the same man whom Paul admonished in First Corinthians, chapter five, verses one to five:

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans: for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

How could he be forgiven so easily and freely? How is it possible to love and forgive such a person who caused so much grief? She recalled the words from Second Corinthians, chapter two, verse five, that gave her so much trouble:

But if any one has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure--not to put it too severely--to you all. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough; so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

"You're right Karen. I can't close my eyes to it. I know the Bible speaks about Christians loving and forgiving, but it really is hard for me to love and forgive when Bill can still hurt me and hold me in his power through the children."

"Do you think it can come about? Do you think we can really forgive?"

"Well, I want to believe it's possible. I feel sure we can, somehow. After all, we have been forgiven by God, and if God can forgive us, we should be able to forgive each

other." Donna's voice began to trail off.

"You don't sound very convincing."

Donna thought back to the doctrine of grace she learned in seminary: how God forgave people in spite of their sins. The doctrine of grace as unconditional love made her feel uncomfortable. She never did understand it, but the professors always seemed so sure of God's forgiving nature that no questions were raised about the validity of grace. How could people be forgiven in spite of their sins--especially if they kept sinning? "Well, I see some problems with forgiveness as unconditional love," Donna said. "Maybe unconditional love is a part of God's free gift, but I know it's difficult to continue giving when you don't really want to give anymore. It's even harder to forgive when you don't really want to forgive. That type of forgiveness is not a free gift of love. It's not free, it comes with a price. In that sense, I guess grace and forgiveness have a hold on us. They keep us, forever."

"But I'm sick and tired of being held in Dave's power. I want to be free to love, to get angry, or to be unforgiving. I want to be free in my relationship with Billy."

Donna suddenly thought about what Karen said about being free. Maybe grace was not just unconditional love. Perhaps true grace was love derived out of freedom. That idea startled her. Perhaps the reason the community could forgive the man in Second Corinthians was because they felt

confident of their own position and no longer had to make a pretense about their feeling over his actions. Perhaps Paul had purposely confronted the community and the man over a false game they were playing with each other. Forgiveness took place through honesty and pain, yes, but it also took place through game-free intimacy. "Karen, what you said has struck a bell with me. Perhaps the reason I am feeling uncomfortable about my own feelings over your situation is that I have never allowed myself the pleasure to be free of the problems in my relationship with Bill causing my divorce--and now." Donna suddenly grew sullen. "I guess that's it. I have never resolved my past hang-ups with Bill and it is coming out in my feelings over his relationship with the children."

"Huh, what do you mean?"

"I guess I am saying the reason I feel uncomfortable with Bill and the children is that I have the same unloving feelings about Bill after the divorce that I had during that last year of our marriage, but I have hidden them because I felt it the proper thing to do. After the divorce, I wanted to believe I was free of the legal and emotional hold he had over me. Now I realize I am free of the legal hold, but not the emotional. He still makes me angry--and it comes out in me when I think of him and the children."

"Do you think that's what's happening with me and Dave?"

"It could be. It might be something to look into."

"But what about Billy, why the resentment?"

"I'm not sure about that Karen. My kids never have seemed to resent me. They are only confused at times. Maybe Billy senses something wrong with the way things are. Maybe he is picking up on the uncomfortableness of the situation, you know, you being nice and friendly toward Dave while getting a divorce. Divorce is not that easy on children. They are pretty perceptive about picking up on feelings. Perhaps if you told him you are mad at his daddy, he at least wouldn't be getting a double message. That way he could see you and Dave congruent with the divorce."

"That sounds scary. I don't want to get Billy mad at me. It might make it worse than it is. I want Billy close to me, not far away. If I tell him I'm mad at his daddy, he may think Dave loves him more than I do."

Donna knew that feeling even now. But she also began to see that her relationship with Bill kept being dishonest because of the fear she had of losing Joey's and Cynthia's love to their father. "Karen, I'm scared too, but talking with you has opened my eyes to some things. I know there is the possibility of losing your son's love and affection to his dad. You see, I have been hiding my feeling for years for the same reason. Now it's going to be tough to break the dishonest pattern I've established with Bill. In fact, it may be too late to break it without opening up old wounds."

"Aren't you afraid the children will get angry at the change? If you get their father mad at you, he may turn

them against you."

Donna felt a tinge of discomfort. "I don't know. They might be confused because of the sudden change of behavior, as will Bill, but it's not like I am going to break the relationship with them. I guess I just want to be honest with myself--but let me ask you, do you think Billy will resent you more if you are honest about the situation between Dave and yourself?"

Karen was thinking now. "That's something I don't know, I hope not. Maybe it's a chance I'll have to take. I'm just tired of the loving and forgiving front I have with Dave."

"Well, maybe what you're doing is unloving and unforgiving. Until now I thought unconditional love and forgiveness was a mark of Christianity--and now I wonder. . . "

"I guess I am going to have to try to achieve some type of freedom from Dave. Maybe that is the route to forgiveness. I know one thing though, it sure is going to force me to develop a strong relationship with Billy. It's going to make me deal with him. If I have to cut it off with Dave, by not bending over backwards for him, I'm going to have to sit down and talk with Billy. I hope he understands that I can't get along with his dad."

"It's something I want to do too. It may be harder for me though. I've got four years of repressing some feelings with Bill. The kids are just old enough to say 'why are you acting this way now?' It might be kind of embarrassing,

them against you."

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"It's something I want to do too. It may be harder for me though. I've got four years of repressing some feelings with Bill. The kids are just old enough to say 'why are you acting this way now?' It might be kind of embarrassing,

but I've got to allow myself a freedom I've never allowed myself in the past. Perhaps freedom and forgiveness have been waiting for four years and now I can cash in on them. I think Joey and Cynthia will understand. Anyway, that's something I'll deal with as it comes up. We are pretty close, and I've been honest with them in the past. Perhaps that's the route to go. Work on your relationship with Billy through Billy, not through his father."

"Thanks Donna, I don't know what will happen, but it's worth a try."

"I should be thanking you Karen. Perhaps it's the way God works, but you have thrown light on some very difficult questions I've been asking myself for years. Take care and let me know what happens."